

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

2020-2021





UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.



UN Women works globally to make the vision of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls.

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COVER PHOTO: Artists from the Janakpur Women's Development Center in Janakpur, Nepal pose in front of mural they created. The mural shows a folk dance of the Musahar community in southern Nepal, where women dance balancing clay pots on their heads. The artists, from left, are: Manjula Thakur, Rebati Mandal, Sudhira Karna and Madhumala Mandal. This photo was taken on 3 December 2021.
Photo: UN Women/Subeksha Poudel

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Photo: Scenario/Punsiri Siriwetchapun/UN Women

CELEBRITIES BROADCAST UN WOMEN'S MESSAGE

Five Thai entertainment celebrities from Scenario Co., Ltd. pose on 6 November 2021 in Bangkok, Thailand for a public service announcement for the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. They are, from left: Jazzy Chewter, Amita Tata Young, Christina Aguilar, Rusameekae Fagerlund and Metinee Kingpayome. Their messages were shown on Bangkok's commuter trains, on highway billboards and on their social media platforms, catching millions of eyeballs. Photo: Scenario/Punsiri Siriwetchapun/UN Women



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	coronavirus disease
CSO	civil society organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
LGBTIQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersex and queer or questioning+
NGO	non-governmental organization
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WHO	World Health Organization

FOREWORD



There were days, particularly the dark days of COVID-19, when the challenges appeared insurmountable. At times I wondered whether we would ever live in a world with equality in leadership opportunities, protection and governance for everyone.

The pandemic highlighted the immense challenges that women face in their health, safety and livelihoods. Many women, especially those in vulnerable communities, have lost a generation's worth of economic gains. With the increase in gender-based violence and the reversal of decades of advancement for women in the workplace, we have reached an inflection point for gender equality.

Whenever a disaster occurs, gender inequality becomes more apparent. Most of the health-care workers, caretakers, and community responders on the COVID-19 front lines were women. However, women were overwhelmingly missing from decision-making on pandemic response and recovery.

It's clear how much we are missing by not tapping enough into women's participation and leadership. Politics and public service are still largely men's domains in the Asia-Pacific region and yet, globally health and economic outcomes during the pandemic have been better in countries led by women.

Globally, due to the impact of the pandemic, the total number of women and girls living in extreme poverty increased. Women were more likely to lose their source of income and less likely to be covered by social protection measures. The numbers are especially astounding in Asia and the Pacific, the only region where the number of women employees has stagnated and where fewer women are entering the workforce.

What's more, domestic violence and violence against women and girls skyrocketed in the region during the pandemic. Women and girls faced greater threats to their personal security, and sexual abuse or violence inflicted by intimate partners.

But as the challenges mounted, so did our determination to overcome them. As this report documents, UN Women was not alone in this struggle. We relied on our donors, local partners and a network of civil society organizations to reach vulnerable communities. And to be effective, we were agile and found innovative partnership models that worked at all scales and levels.

Our objective is "building back better", though I prefer to think of it as "building back equal". We work with Member States, the private sector and international financial institutions to contribute for a better system of social protection against economic volatility and future pandemics.

The beauty of UN Women's Generation Equality initiative is in its Action Coalitions: global, innovative, multi-stakeholder partnerships bringing together national, corporate and civil society organizations for collective action to achieve tangible goals on gender equality and human rights for women and girls. By reshaping how we collaborate with partners, we are able to develop comprehensive programmes that identify and address multiple needs simultaneously and create a more equal and resilient Asia-Pacific.

Australia has been our unwavering ally in Asia and the Pacific for many years. Finland, Norway, Sweden, the European Union and Japan are all steadfast partners. We are fortunate to include Canada, Germany, Republic of Korea and Denmark as new regional partners to advance women's peace and security.

In the past decade, we have advanced our relationship with the private sector and now count companies like Rockcheck Puji, IKEA, BHP and Chanel among our partners.

We have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Asian Development Bank to advance women's and girls' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic's multiple negative consequences on jobs, livelihoods and well-being; And we have formed a new partnership with the World Design Organization to study how design play a role in the prevention of violence against women and girls. We are also looking at providing individual donors with ways to become partners, in line with the model of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Our greatest partnership, however, is with the new generation of young leaders. Our goals and aspirations will be shaped by their vision. I am encouraged, not least because I have the privilege of working every day with the next generation of feminists, activists, entrepreneurs and philanthropists. This new generation is crucial to making this world a more just and equal place and to ending violence and discrimination against women. Their innovative work and dedication give me hope that the challenges we face now – and those we will face in the future – can always be overcome.

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'Mohammad Naciri'. The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large loop at the end.

Mohammad Naciri
UN Women Regional Director
for Asia and the Pacific



A COVID-19 prevention programme of Nglinggi Peace Village in Klaten, Central Java, Indonesia in February 2021 shows women and children how to protect themselves and their communities against COVID-19. Photo: UN Women/ Ali Lutfi

I. INTRODUCTION: EASING THE PANDEMIC'S DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

While the world pressed ahead with mass vaccinations in late 2021, there was still no end in sight to the shocks of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic as new strains of the virus emerged and infections kept spreading.

The impacts of the pandemic have hit hardest the most vulnerable people, in particular indigenous people, refugees, migrants and stateless people. And it has been worse for the women and girls among them; they have faced disproportionate impacts that have turned back some of their hard-fought gains to advance gender equality and rights.

As authorities imposed lockdowns and other restrictions to try to stem the virus, rates of violence against women and girls soared so high that it has been described as the “shadow pandemic”. With women also shouldering job losses, economic insecurity, increased care work at home and

increased mental health problems, COVID-19 has laid bare gender and other persistent fault lines of inequality.

As of March 2020, around 65 per cent of women in Asia and the Pacific worked in the informal economy, the sector hardest hit by the pandemic. At the same time, women made up over two-thirds of workers in the health and social services sectors, placing them at the front lines of the pandemic response. In Hubei province, **China**, women made up more than 90 per cent of the health-care workers on the front lines. In South-East Asia, women made up 79 per cent of nurses and in Western Pacific 81 per cent.¹

1. “The COVID-19 outbreak and gender: Regional analysis and recommendations from Asia and the Pacific”

ASSESSING THE IMPACT, LAYING FOUNDATION FOR ACTION

Just a few weeks after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020, UN Women worked with Governments and mobile network operators to do smartphone surveys of millions of people in 11 countries across the Asia-Pacific region as face-to-face data collection was impossible.²

These rapid assessments found that women in Bangladesh and Pakistan were receiving less information than men about how to protect themselves from the virus. Women in the Philippines were being affected mentally and emotionally more than men. Women in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Thailand were waiting longer to see a doctor than men. Women and girls faced intensified risk of domestic and gender-based violence due to disruptions in support services for survivors, mobility restrictions, and unemployment and economic insecurity heightened by the pandemic.

On 21 July 2020, UN Women documented these inequalities in the world's first comprehensive report on the gendered impacts of COVID-19, ["Unlocking the lockdown: The gendered effects of COVID-19 on achieving the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific"](#). The SDGs are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

TAKING ACTION

The report formed the basis on which UN Women worked closely with governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), development partners, and many other partners on emergency measures to distribute relief supplies, keep women's crisis centres open, support women's small businesses, and ensure women had social safety nets. It also highlighted the importance of evidence-based decision-making. As a result, our Building Back Better programme was established with funding from the Government of Australia to support countries in furthering the production and use of gender data to inform crisis responses.

Funding from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund enhanced UN Women's ability to meet the time-critical needs of vulnerable people in **Pakistan**. In coordination with the Government, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other United Nations agencies, we worked to protect groups including women and girls and people with disabilities. We gave livelihood support to survivors

of gender-based violence so they could become financially independent. In 2020-2021 UN Women worked closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Pishin and Quetta districts of Balochistan province to meet the needs of Afghan women refugees and the host communities around the refugee camps.

In 2020 UN Women and UNHCR agreed to strengthen joint efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all site management and training activities in 13 Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, **Bangladesh**. UN Women delivered sexual and reproductive health services through five Multi-Purpose Women's Centres in the camps. We trained special women police officers to staff help desks that offered 24/7 services for gender-based violence cases and Rohingya women volunteers to deal with cases of gender-based violence, trafficking and exploitation. We organized women in the camps to make reusable face masks and sanitary napkins and gave technical advice to other humanitarian organizations so that they could do the same.

UN Women created a Gender Monitoring Network of women-led or gender-focused NGOs across Bangladesh to gather information on COVID-19-related challenges that women and girls and other vulnerable groups were facing. We helped the network produce a call for action, widely circulated in the media, to make gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls central to COVID-19 prevention.

In **Afghanistan**, UN Women worked with a team of international humanitarian organizations to make the national COVID-19 response plan gender-inclusive.

As COVID-19 infections overwhelmed the health-care system in **India**, UN Women trained and upskilled 10,000 nurses and nurse assistants to handle patients while ensuring their own safety.

UN Women helped stem gender-based violence during the pandemic in India through a joint programme with WHO, UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Multi-Partner Trust Fund Programme on Protection of Women and Girls from Sexual Violence in Times of COVID-19 began in late 2020. The programme uses technology-enabled solutions to provide women and girls with information, training, employment opportunities and access to networks. In collaboration with DolphinChat AI based in India, UN Women developed SAMBAL, an AI-based smartphone chatbot that helps survivors of violence and their supporters to understand and

2. "Rapid gender assessment surveys on the impacts of COVID-19: Guidance document"

access mental health, medical and legal procedures and services. We launched the chatbot on 10 December 2021, Human Rights Day.

Also in **India**, starting in October 2021 UN Women and UNHCR worked to meet the emergency needs of the most vulnerable women refugees and asylum seekers during their struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic. We gave training on reproductive health to more than 900 Afghan women refugees between the ages of 13 and 49, along with “dignity kits” containing underpants, soap and sanitary napkins. We also gave 500 Afghan refugee and asylum seeker families in New Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune INR 5,000 (\$65) in cash each to help with essential household and personal needs. These were families who had been evicted or faced a high risk of eviction because they could not pay rent; women-headed households; and families with members with disabilities, elderly and medically vulnerable people.

As an immediate response to the pandemic, UN Women provided at least 10,000 vulnerable women throughout **Thailand** – migrant workers, ethnic minorities, survivors of civil conflict or of violent assault -- with hygiene supplies and raised their awareness of gender-based violence. We supported community radio

broadcasts and efforts by women leaders to inform communities about COVID-19 prevention and gender-based violence.

In 2020, with funding from the Government of Australia, UN Women together with the local NGO Viluthu provided more than 1,300 women-headed households in **Sri Lanka** with COVID-19 emergency relief packs, along with information on public health guidelines and services. We also gave this support to members of vulnerable groups including former combatants; women who had lost their spouses due to conflict; women with disabilities; youths; elderly women; LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer or questioning+) people; daily-wage workers; and people trapped in debt.

In **Nepal**, in 2020-2021 UN Women as the chair of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team convened more than 2,100 representatives of the Government, CSOs, development partners and United Nations agencies to respond to the needs and concerns of women and marginalized groups in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. These meetings effectively advocated for their equal rights to information; vaccination without requiring a citizenship certificate; relief packages including cash and in-kind support; and services like psychosocial counselling.



SAYING HELLO SAFELY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific promoted “safe greetings” from early on in the pandemic. Through social media messages and illustrations, the Greet Like Me campaign invited people to practice social distancing while embracing their local traditions.

The campaign promoted greeting gestures commonly used in the region’s countries and urged people to avoid shaking hands, hugging or kissing cheeks.

Greet Like Me was inspired by the Salam for Safety campaign created by UN Women in Afghanistan. That campaign used posters of women in traditional clothes to encourage using the traditional greeting “Salam” (“peace”), which involves placing a hand over your heart.



<http://unwo.men/ZLYL5ojwGFA>

Several Gender in Humanitarian Action documents and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion checklists developed by UN Women were referenced in a landmark Supreme Court ruling in 2020 that asserted the centrality of women's rights in the COVID-19 response.

Following this, in 2021 UN Women and the International Organization for Migration successfully advocated for the Ministry of Health and Population to integrate Gender Equality and Social Inclusion standards into the health assessment checklist used at the country's border entry points. The revised checklist will enable the Government to manage health crises with strong attention to the rights of women and vulnerable groups.

UN Women also organized hundreds of women home-based workers in **Nepal** to make masks to ease a shortage of personal protective equipment.

In **Indonesia**, under the Secretary-General's UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund, from June 2020 to March 2021 UN Women together with UNICEF, United Nations Development Programme and World Food Programme immediately supported the Government, civil society and women's organizations and the private sector in giving gender-responsive social protection to the most vulnerable people. We made use of innovative data and technology to rapidly assess the gender-specific impact of COVID-19 on achieving the SDGs in Indonesia; helped the Government develop the Umbrella Guideline and Protocol for responding to gender-based violence during the pandemic; and together with Yayasan CARE Peduli (CARE Indonesia) jointly launched an innovative cash-for-work project for women garment workers who had lost incomes because of the pandemic. With funding from the European Union, UN Women also provided the Ministry of Social Affairs with over 3,000 units of personal protective equipment, hygiene kits, and information materials on preventing violence against women.

Also in Indonesia, UN Women and its local NGO partner Wahid Foundation adapted their Peace Villages project to give priority to COVID-19 prevention and response, supporting mitigation efforts by grassroots women's groups. In close consultation with the communities, we distributed food and hygiene packages to 10 Peace Villages across Java island, did contact tracing via WhatsApp, and provided business recovery funds and training to women who owned small businesses. Several Peace Villages formed women-led task forces that raised awareness about COVID-19 health protocols, disinfected public spaces, and made and distributed face masks.

In **Fiji**, UN Women distributed personal protective equipment to Salvation Army Fiji Family Care Centres in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa to enable them to continue providing essential services safely to women and girls. We provided municipal markets in the country with about 8,000 face masks, 2,000 antibacterial soaps and hand sanitizers, along with bleach, hand gloves, garbage bags and masking tapes.

Of course efforts must be made through policy and legislation to ensure that help reaches women in formalized, systematic ways.

As one of many initiatives addressing the worsening security situation for women and girls, UN Women worked with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to train police and policymakers on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and what law enforcement should do about it.

In **India**, UN Women trained 450 members of the Central Reserve Police Force on attending to women's needs and concerns in policing and humanitarian assistance.

In **the Philippines**, UN Women helped draft the proposed Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Protocols Pandemic Management Act of 2021. The House Committee on Women and Gender Equality approved House Bill 9059 pending consolidation and bicameral session with the Senate. The bill establishes the Government's mandate to address the gender-differentiated needs of women, especially marginalized women or at-risk individuals including migrant workers and survivors of violence. It also seeks to institutionalize meaningful participation of women in leadership, decision-making and policymaking positions at all levels, and to strengthen gender-based violence preparedness and response. On International Women's Day, 8 March 2021, women senators led by Senator Risa Hontiveros filed the corresponding Senate Bill No. 2088.³

In summary, during these two challenging years, UN Women first identified what actions were needed to stop the threats to the gains that women and girls in Asia and the Pacific had made towards the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We shifted gears in order to advance the agenda's priority areas, targeting multiple areas, working with multiple partners, using often novel methods in the context of the pandemic.

3. "Women senators file bill to protect women during disasters, emergencies"

INDONESIA

“I MAY NOT BE PHYSICALLY PRESENT, BUT I WANT TO STILL BE THERE TO GIVE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT.”

“Before the COVID-19 outbreak, I with four other counsellors would handle at least 100 patients every day. Now, although I have less in-person patients visiting the hospital unless it’s for a necessary doctor’s appointment or to pick up medication, my work doesn’t stop there.

When at home, my cell phone is glued to my hand to listen to and provide all the necessary information to my HIV-positive peers. With the current situation, I may not be physically present, but I want to still be there to give mental and emotional support.

The coronavirus pandemic is difficult for everyone. Bali ... has been hit hard. The local residents ... have traditionally relied on the tourism industry, but with the increased travel restrictions and with hotels and restaurants being temporarily closed, many people are left without jobs.

Many women living with HIV are also breadwinners. With this situation, they can’t earn money anymore to help the family. ... The financial hardship is even more challenging when they run out of medication. The choice is between spending money to go to the hospital and get the medication or retaining the meager savings to sustain their livelihoods.

There is also disruption in the supply chain, which has affected the availability of ARVs [antiretroviral drugs, for HIV]. ... This pandemic has changed everything: the scarcity of the ARVs, the thought of having to change the medication, and with the struggle to make ends meet, some of them lost all hope. This is where I have to keep them motivated, lift their spirits, and provide them with information [on] where and in which hospital the medication is available.



Ni Ketut Rediten is shown at Sanglah Hospital in Bali, Indonesia, on 4 May 2020. Photo courtesy of Ni Ketut Rediten

I also fundraise and help in distributing food and basic commodities to people living with HIV who have lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 situation. This situation is not easy, but I see increased solidarity and how people are now supporting one another.”

Ni Ketut Rediten works for the Provincial Health Office and is stationed at Voluntary Counselling and Testing Services on HIV/AIDS, at Sanglah Hospital in Bali, Indonesia. She is a member of Indonesian Positive Women Network, UN Women’s partner for the violence against women and HIV programme in Indonesia.



<http://unwo.men/OP1o5oJwGQo>



A supermarket employee in Bangkok, Thailand arranges a shelf of fresh produce in April 2020, following health safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: UN Women/Ploy Phutpheng

II. SOFTENING THE ECONOMIC BLOWS

One of the first and most profound impacts of COVID-19 has been the economic devastation. The pandemic overturned many gains in poverty reduction, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, where poverty levels are high and less than 40 per cent of the population is covered by at least one social protection cash benefit.⁴

In Asia and the Pacific women earn less than men, lead most single-parent households, and hold more of the insecure jobs in the informal economy that have little or no health care, sick leave or social security protections. This leaves women less able than men to absorb economic shocks.

THE DIRE NUMBERS

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 62 million workers lost work in the Asia-Pacific region in 2020 because of the COVID-19 crisis. Women and young people experienced higher shares of job loss compared to their older, and male counterparts.⁵

Parts of Asia and the Pacific will see the largest increases in extreme poverty, with an additional 54 million people living below the poverty line due to the pandemic. As the crisis worsened, gender poverty gaps widened. In mid-2020, The World Bank said it expected that there would be 118 women in poverty for every 100 poor men globally, a ratio that could rise to 121:100 by 2030. South Asia is expected to be the most affected region, with the ratio rising to 129:100 by 2030.⁶

UN Women's smartphone surveys in early 2020 found that job losses among informal-sector workers ranged from 25 to 56 per cent in all countries.⁷ Subsequent surveys in 2021 demonstrated that owing to higher vulnerability of women's jobs and pandemic-driven rises in unpaid care and domestic work burdens, a larger share of women were pushed out of labour markets and into unpaid household work. In addition, enterprises run by women were particularly vulnerable because they were disproportionately involved in sectors hardest-hit by the pandemic, such as tourism, hospitality, garment and textile manufacture, agriculture and retail.

4. "Leave no one behind in COVID-19 prevention, response, and recovery"

5. "Women and young people pushed from labour force by COVID-19"

6. *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19*

7. "Surveys show that COVID-19 has gendered efforts in Asia and the Pacific"

The economic and mental pressure on women issued not just from paid work outside, but unpaid care and domestic work at home.

During the pandemic, school closures, overburdened health-care systems, and increased vulnerability of the sick and the aged added to caregiving demands and forced many women and girls to leave their paid jobs. In 2020 women in the Asia-Pacific region spent as much as 11 times more hours than men on unpaid care work.⁸

STRENGTHENING THE DATA

One of the most significant ways in which UN Women furthers women's economic empowerment is by making more visible the differential economic impacts on women. Our gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data are used to inform national COVID-19 response policies and bring to light the gender imbalance both in policy and in industry. Our Women Count portal publishes data on COVID-19 impacts and responses as they happen. As previously mentioned, UN Women conducted two rounds of phone rapid assessment surveys of millions of people to capture the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of women versus men.

Through the Building Back Better project, UN Women also supports countries in the Pacific and South-East Asia to implement national resilience surveys and conduct big data analysis. This information is key for evidence-based policymaking.

SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

UN Women provided policy advice and data to Governments to design economic stimulus programmes that specifically targeted women and girls in both the formal and informal sectors. UN Women and ILO jointly did rapid gender impact assessments on employment, estimated public investment needs in the health and care sectors, and supported the design of gender-responsive economic stimulus packages.

UN Women proposals that Governments in the region have adopted include expanding cash transfer programmes and making use of mobile banking to ensure women in the informal sectors have access to and control of their funds. Along with our partners in government, women's CSOs, and NGOs, we facilitated

women's access to and awareness of government schemes to support them through the pandemic.

In **Pakistan**, UN Women-commissioned research in 2020 by Shirkat Gah (A Participatory Place), a local women's rights group, found that the Government's COVID-19 relief measures (largely extensions of existing, inadequate cash transfer programmes) were not commensurate with the economic impact on women and other vulnerable groups. The only gender-sensitive measure was a continuation of short-term assistance via the Benazir Income Support Programme and the Ehsaas Kafalat programme in which 4.5 million registered women received an extra PKR 1,000 (\$5.70) emergency relief per month for four months. Similar small financial packages for the poorest of the poor were announced by provincial governments, but with no specific quotas for women or women-headed households.

Similarly, in **Bangladesh**, a UN Women study on the gender-responsiveness of the stimulus package revealed inadequate support for the more vulnerable women such as micro-entrepreneurs. The findings were used to mobilize donor support for a programme on financial inclusion and integration of women entrepreneurs into the local economy.

In **Fiji**, as a member of the COVID-19 Response Gender Working Group, we advised the Government on a national economic recovery plan that considers gender as an integral part.

GIVING DIRECT HELP

In **Thailand**, UN Women designed economic empowerment and livelihood improvement schemes for women affected by COVID-19; this included producing hygiene masks and basic supplies. Also, together with ILO, UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration, UN Women provided policy advice to expand social protection and assistance for at least 8 million vulnerable Thais through the Government's child support, disability and old age allowance schemes.

UN Women also supported women heads of households who were among women most severely affected by the pandemic.

8. *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and Pathways for Transformative Change by 2030*

In countries like **Sri Lanka**, where over a quarter of the households are headed by women, pandemic-induced lockdowns saw women heads of households faced with the double burden of caring for their dependents at home while still being the sole provider for the family.

With funding from the Government of Japan, UN Women supported women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka through several initiatives including a project called Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities: Promoting Peace and Preventing Intolerance in Sri Lanka. In 2020 the project provided over 100 women heads of households with training on business planning, financial literacy, marketing and product development, as well as in-kind support to upscale their small businesses.

Mobile sales carts are commonly used for goods and services in Sri Lanka, and UN Women gave such carts to women-led businesses so they could continue operating and find new customers.

In **Pakistan**, UN Women supported a digital literacy programme that taught women home-based workers how to use their smartphones, social media platforms and apps such as WhatsApp and Mobile Cash accounts to run an online business. A total of 64 women in five cities took the six-week online course in 2020.

In **Bangladesh** and **Indonesia**, UN Women's cash and cash-for-work programmes gave immediate financial support to women, including migrant workers, who lost jobs and income because of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

According to Better Work Indonesia, a programme of ILO and International Finance Corporation, women account for approximately 80 per cent of the garment sector workforce in Indonesia. Indonesia's Textile Association reported in April 2020 that COVID-19 had temporarily halted the operations of 80 per cent of textile and textile products companies in the country.

In 2020-2021, UN Women partnered with the NGO Yayasan CARE Peduli (CARE Indonesia) to support women garment workers in Sukabumi, West Java province – a major hub of the Indonesian garment sector – along with other groups of women affected by COVID-19. The project involved cash-for-work and cash and voucher assistance supported by the UN COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust Fund and the Government of

Japan. This assistance sustained 610 women for three months. Also, 60 garment workers who had lost their jobs received training on how to sew masks; they were provided with the sewing machines, materials and supplies afterwards. Another 209 women received incentives to market these masks. The project included giving gender-sensitivity training to the women's male partners so they can create more equal relationships in the household. A survey found that the project resulted in a significant rise in the percentage of the women who said they were highly involved in decision-making on their household's daily needs and in the level of their participation in managing their incomes.

This project was different from the typical cash-for-work project, which focuses on labour-intensive infrastructure development.

With funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, from September 2019 to June 2021 UN Women ran the project, Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand. UN Women partnered with Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative, a Philippines-based NGO, to train 163 members of CSOs and migrant resource centres to give entrepreneurship skills training, business mentoring, reintegration counseling, referrals and information to women who had returned to the three countries after working abroad, so they could start or scale up businesses. A total of 260 women received the training and support; of them, 121 were able to start or improve businesses. The assistance enabled the women to take care of themselves and their families during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The women's businesses also created jobs for 97 people in their home communities.

PAKISTAN

“I DO NOT WANT TO LET PEOPLE SHAME WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND BELITTLE THEIR WORTH. NO MATTER THE CHALLENGES, WE ARE WORTHY OF LIVING DIGNIFIED LIVES.”

“At the age of two, my leg became disabled due to polio. I didn’t realize how sheltered and protected I was from society’s gossip when my parents were alive. My parents encouraged me to pursue education – not to let polio limit life’s opportunities.

Unfortunately, by 2005 both my parents had passed away. Being one of the eldest siblings, I took it upon myself to look after my six sisters and two brothers. To make ends meet, I took on numerous odd jobs and used to crawl my way to clean people’s homes or wash clothes. In 2007, I pursued a fashion design course to strengthen the hand embroidery lessons I had received from my Dadi (grandmother).

Having a disability is one thing. When your own family disregards your efforts and doesn’t treat you well, it hurts. ... But I believe it made me stronger.

Life isn’t easy. I crawl, scratch and craft my livelihood every day.

During COVID, I and my 40 women artisans, the majority of whom also have disabilities, are struggling economically.

It’s time we stand up to the stigma against people with disabilities. What this world needs is less judgement and more kindness, so people can confidently develop their social, economic and political skills.

I want people to be more mindful of their words, attitudes and actions because they may not physically harm you, but it is emotionally scarring. I want to tell my polio sisters never to lose faith. Don’t let other people devalue your worth.

There needs to be more support, care and understanding from family members. As well as more facilities for members of society with disabilities so that they can pursue education and jobs with less



Bushra Abdullah poses in front of bundles of her embroidery work on 17 July 2021 in Multan, Pakistan. Photo courtesy of Kaarvan Crafts Foundation/Muhammad Zameer

systemic hindrances. In Pakistan the majority of places including government departments are not wheelchair-accessible. Similarly, public transport is also not accessible to people with disabilities.

The more activists and institutions join the cause, the greater the change. We all have a lot of work ahead of us.”

Bushra Abdullah, 40, does home-based stitching work in Ahmedabad in Punjab Province, Pakistan. In 2021 she participated in UN Women’s project Empowered Women, Resilient Communities, where she learned entrepreneurship, financial and other skills. The project was done in partnership with Kaarvan Crafts Foundation, a Pakistani NGO, and funded by the Government of Norway.



<http://unwo.men/6R2c5oJwGHX>

INDONESIA

CASH-FOR-WORK PROGRAMME HELPS WOMEN MAKE ENDS MEET DURING PANDEMIC



Indonesian garment workers who lost their jobs receive training to sew masks as part of the UN Women cash-for-work programme. This photo was taken on 21 February 2021 in Sakabumi, West Java, Indonesia. Photo: UN Women/Putra Djohan

Eni Sumarni lives in Pondok Kaso Village in Sukabumi, West Java province of Indonesia. She is the main provider for her family, including her parents who live with her. But she lost her job when her garment factory closed.

“The pandemic has been challenging for me,” she said. “I lost my job, but I still have to pay for my mother’s medical treatments. The cash-for-work programme has opened an opportunity for me to generate new income.”

Icoh, another participant in the UN Women programme, said: “Cash-for-work has helped me gain new skills. I also got to meet other women here that faced similar challenges, and we support each other. The income that I receive will be used to cover my daily needs and some of it will be put away for savings. I plan to join a cooperative and hope to start my own sewing business someday.”



Indonesian women participating in the UN Women cash-for-work programme receive entrepreneurship and digital marketing training through welearn.unwomen.org. This photo was taken on 22 February 2021 in Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia, Photo: UN Women/Putra Djohan



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EMPOWERING WOMEN IN PRIVATE BUSINESSES

In **China**, in December 2020 UN Women partnered with IKEA China to launch a two-year project, A Place Called Home – WeCare, to raise public awareness and encourage companies to adopt policies targeting two problems that hinder women’s economic empowerment – unpaid care and domestic work, and violence against women. IKEA China funds the project.

Under the project, in 2021 UN Women partnered with the Chinese Enterprise Confederation, the officially designated employers’ organization, to pilot changes in workplace policies in six companies and enterprises. The partnership surveyed 3,240 companies nationwide to assess the gaps and good practices in the workplace environment for women. It also reviewed China’s laws and policies on gender-based violence, and measures to accommodate the needs of women employees who take care of families or children. The research provided solid evidence for the partnership’s recommendations for improvements, including recognizing the value of unpaid care work; introducing a specific law against gender discrimination in employment; and increasing penalties for gender discrimination and for sexual harassment in the workplace.

Throughout 2021, UN Women also worked with IKEA China to change mainstream attitudes about unpaid care work in households. This focused on engaging men to advocate for the sharing of the care burden. Two campaigns launched on the social media platform Weibo attracted over 15 million views. UN Women China’s Goodwill Ambassador, well-known actor Tong Dawei, spoke out in support of shared responsibility. A UN Women-IKEA China online video call-to-action for men and boys to share responsibilities attracted over 100,000 views during the first week of its launch.

One of the most significant partnerships for the economic empowerment of women in the region is the WeEmpowerAsia programme, run by UN Women and funded by the European Union. The programme promotes women’s participation and leadership in private-sector businesses in seven middle-income countries: **China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand** and **Viet Nam**. It encourages policymakers to improve conditions for women’s economic empowerment, and encourages companies to commit to the Women’s Empowerment Principles.

The number of signatories to the principles in the Asia-Pacific region has grown to more than 1,200. The momentum has been strong; in India, for example, a total of 251 companies signed on in 2020-2021, bringing the country’s overall total to 305.

In collaboration with Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian Government, WeEmpowerAsia did large-scale surveys on the effects of COVID-19 on the private sectors in **Indonesia, the Philippines** and **Viet Nam** to help them build back better in a more gender-inclusive way.

WeEmpowerAsia created the first-ever opportunity for women entrepreneurs in **India** to become a part of the supply chains of major brands, in this case, H&M, Amazon, WinPE, Medusa and Okhai. In 2021, in the second phase of its Industry Disruptor programme, WeEmpowerAsia collaborated with seasoned mentors to train over 80 women entrepreneurs on gender-responsive business development strategies, access to finance and markets, and technical skills. Twenty-three participants who did further intensive training created four proposals for startups in response to sustainable-business challenges from the five major brands. The entrepreneurs also were linked to a network of women entrepreneurs worldwide managed by the Berlin-based new-economy platform DO, UN Women’s project implementing partner. The other two will be developed further by H&M and private equity platform WinPE. With financial support from the five brands, WeEmpowerAsia plans to replicate the Industry Disruptor programme with other financial investors and increase the number of participating women entrepreneurs.

Following their collaboration on the Industry Disruptor, UN Women and H&M are now jointly working to implement India’s national law on Prevention of Sexual Harassment across H&M’s supply chains and factory floors.

In **Indonesia**, in 2020 WeEmpowerAsia worked with Angel Investment Network Indonesia to promote “gender lens investing” to reduce gender discrimination and increase women’s access to entrepreneurship opportunities.

Also in 2020, WeEmpowerAsia hosted webinars for companies in **the Philippines** on meeting gender concerns in response and recovery measures. It also provided more than 700 women entrepreneurs and freelancers with training on transitioning to online business.

In **Viet Nam**, the programme helped the Government make the decree on small and medium enterprises more gender-responsive, including through provisions for women-owned enterprises. The decree

was promulgated on 15 May 2020. A WeEmpowerAsia campaign encouraged private-sector companies to prevent gender-based and domestic violence among their employees. Japan's Fast Retailing Company and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded the campaign.

INDIA

“MY MESSAGE TO EVERY PARENT: GET YOUR GIRLS EDUCATED.”

“In 2014, when I went to Jaisalmer to take a computer course, people said, ‘What is the point? What will you do after learning about computers?’ Today, almost every job profile asks for computer proficiency. My parents had gone through their share of struggles; they understood the value of education. While they worked in farming and construction, they didn't want me to work in the fields.

These days there are many incentives for girls to study, such as government scholarships, free laptops, and better mobility using scooters and bikes. Girls also feel motivated to stay in school when they have peer groups who are interested to study.

Cases of child marriage have also declined in the village, but there are some exceptions. In large families, when the father is unable to provide for everyone, girls are married off early.

Roughly 60 per cent of girls in the village have completed their 10th grade and around 25 per cent of girls have completed their 12th grade. This year, six girls have graduated – an increase compared to last year when only two graduated.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted entire families. Many people lost their jobs. Those who used to work in the cities as daily wage earners came back to the village but found it difficult to adjust to village life. Many women and girls lacked access to employment and education.



Ramat Khan is seen with her students at a Women's Empowerment Hub in Rajasthan, India, where women and girls can get education and vocational skills training. Photo: UN Women India

During the lockdowns, women and girls couldn't come to the [UN Women's] Women's Empowerment Hub to attend classes like before. I guided them to study at home, and if they had any doubts or difficulties, I would visit them in their homes to discuss the lessons. ...

My message to every parent: Get your girls educated. When every young woman and girl in this country becomes capable and self-sufficient, no one can pull us down.”

Ramat Khan, 21, comes from a small village near Jaisalmer, in Rajasthan state in northern India, where poverty is widespread and child marriage is still practiced. Once married, most girls drop out of school in order to take care of the household and bear children. As a community educator with UN Women's Second Chance Education programme, Khan encourages women and girls in her village to complete their education. During the pandemic, Khan continued to teach.



<http://unwo.men/WK9V50JwGJ3>



Women from a Bangladeshi community around a Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh show their paintings signaling, "Stop violence against women and girls". The event is held at a UN Women facility at Ukhia on 25 November 2021 as part of the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Photo: Courtesy of DanChurchAid

III. STEMMING THE SURGE IN VIOLENCE

Even in “normal” times, women in the region experience high levels of violence. A WHO report in 2021 found that worldwide 27 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.⁹

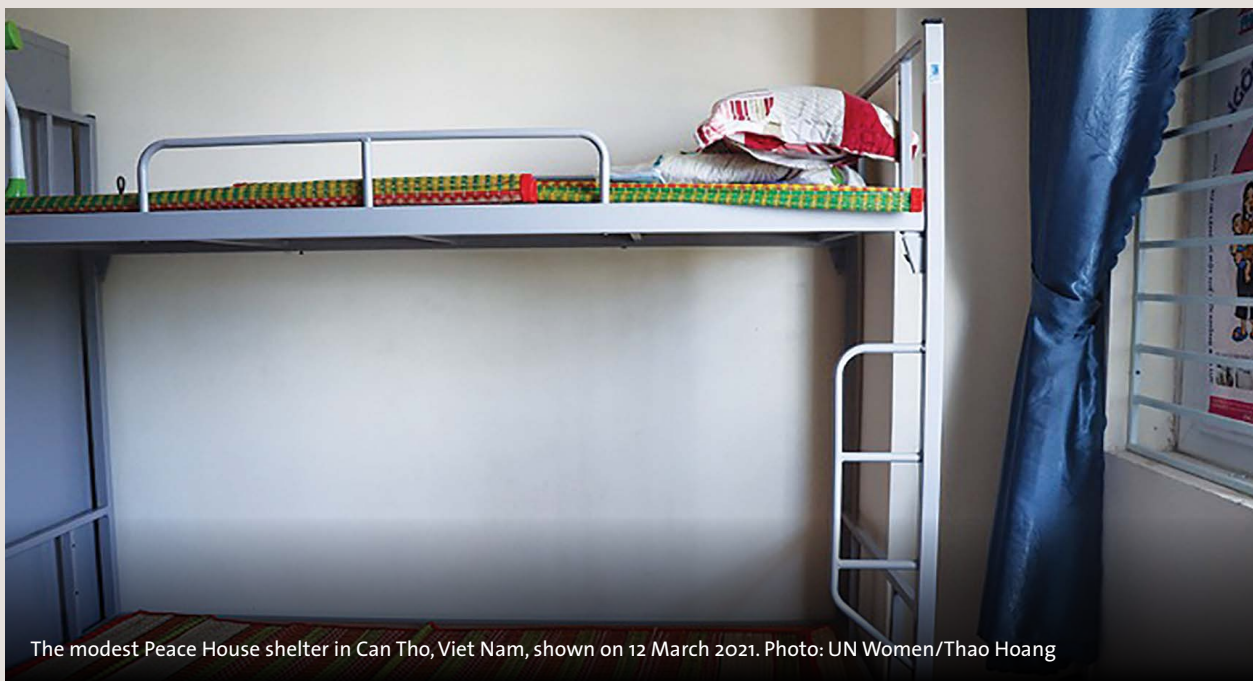
The heightened violence during the COVID-19 pandemic was felt most acutely at home. Economic and social stresses coupled with overcrowded conditions and restricted movement meant that many women were trapped in tense situations at home with their abusers, unable to safely access support.

At the same time, health-care providers and police services were overwhelmed and understaffed, domestic violence shelters full or closed, and support services paralyzed and under-funded.

UN Women worked with Governments, United Nations partners and women’s and other local organizations to ensure that services for violence against women continued during the pandemic. We supported shelters and helplines to ensure women had access to legal services, counselling and referrals to other service providers.

9. “WHO key facts: Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2021”

A SURVIVOR OF ABUSE FINDS SHELTER AT PEACE HOUSE IN VIET NAM



The modest Peace House shelter in Can Tho, Viet Nam, shown on 12 March 2021. Photo: UN Women/Thao Hoang

At just 17 years of age, the girl had endured a lifetime of violence and abuse, inflicted by the very people who were supposed to take care of her. After her father abandoned the family, she was raped by her uncle and punished by her mother for the very abuse she was subjected to. Now, with the help of UN Women, she has finally found some measure of peace.

“I had been sexually abused by my uncle since I was a teenager,” the girl said. “My mom thought that was my fault and asked me to keep silent. She hit me many times and during the COVID-19 pandemic, it escalated.”

The girl was rescued by police in June 2020 when she was three months pregnant and was moved to the UN Women-supported Peace House shelter in Can Tho city, in the Mekong Delta of southern Viet Nam. She gave birth to her baby daughter while staying at the shelter with four other women who had also fled violence.

The two-room shelter was short of funds such that the staff had to cover the window with posters to fend off the hot sun until UN Women donated curtains and other essential materials in March 2021. The residents also received clothes, food, health care, legal and psychological support, and vocational training.

“My baby cries a lot in the evening. All sisters at the house help me to take care of her,” the girl told a UN Women staff member. “They are my true family.”



At the Peace House in Can Tho, Viet Nam, on 12 March 2021, the 17-year-old girl holds a new toy for her baby daughter. Photo: UN Women/Thao Hoang

The National Study on Violence against Women in Viet Nam, done in 2019, found that 63 per cent of women experienced at least one form of violence from an intimate partner during their lifetime.¹⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic heightened that risk. In 2020, calls and text messages to the country's three Peace House shelters, in Can Tho and Ha Noi, increased seven times compared to 2019 and the number of survivors seeking shelter increased 40 per cent.

“We have been uninterruptedly supporting thousands of women and children survivors of violence, but there are limited resources in terms of facilities and services for them in the shelters. Essential things like baby cribs, beds, mattresses, blankets, electric equipment, and so on ... are urgently needed,” said Duong Ngoc Linh, Director of the Center for Women and Development, the Government-affiliated organization that manages the shelters.

UN Women responded with support worth VND 2.4 billion (\$98,000), funded by the Australian Government. In 2020 and 2021, we upgraded the shelters' Internet and telephone systems for the 24/7 maintenance of the hotline and provided household furnishings and appliances. We also gave training on crisis counselling and trauma care to the social workers who staff the shelters.

After the systems upgrade, the Peace House Hotline received 603 calls during the last two months of 2020, compared to 786 calls during the five months before that. During the two-month period, 181 women



Huyen Nguyen, a UN Women staff member, checks on a bed that was among items UN Women donated to the Peace House in Can Tho, Viet Nam, on 12 March 2021. Photo: UN Women/Thao Hoang

survivors of violence received Peace House counselling and referrals to police, health-care and justice services, and 30 were admitted to the shelters.

“We believe that each successful call to the hotline is a lifesaver for the survivors,” said Elisa Fernandez Saenz, Country Representative of UN Women.

The girl who was abused by her uncle and mother was excited when a UN Women staff member told her that her room would soon have new furnishings including a baby crib and a tub, and a sewing machine that she can use for vocational training and to make clothes for her daughter.



<http://unwo.men/JYF250JwGJh>



Social workers including those at the Peace House shelters learn how to make fabric flowers, a group therapy activity to support the well-being of front-line responders. The training was given by UN Women in Hanoi, Viet Nam on 14 January 2021. Photo: UN Women/Ngoc Duong



In Can Tho, Viet Nam, on 12 March 2021, UN Women and the Australian Government hand over donations to Peace House shelters. From left are Elisa Fernandez Saenz, UN Women Country Representative; Andrew Barnes, Australian Embassy Deputy Head of Mission; Duong Ngoc Linh, Director of the Center for Women and Development; and Tran Thi Tuyet Em, Vice Director of the centre. Photo: UN Women/Thao Hoang

10. “Journey for change: Second national study on violence against women in Viet Nam 2019 released”

“We got a call from one of the women in our peer support group. Her friend needed help. The young mother of a 5-year-old and 11-month-old was being hit by her husband. She wanted to leave but had nowhere to go and couldn’t leave Mae Sot with the borders (with Myanmar) closed. Shelter and other services in the area are limited; we rented a room for her and the kids and provided them with food. Now, in addition to providing mental and emotional support, we are also providing food because many families have lost their jobs or have less work because of the COVID-19 crisis.”

Sia Kukaewkasern, a Thai survivor of domestic violence, and founder of the Freedom Restoration Project dedicated to helping migrant women and survivors of domestic violence in Thailand. She has worked with UN Women to advocate on these issues.



<http://unwo.men/LBzW5oJwGJB>

“COVID-19-related lockdowns meant greater isolation, fewer services and a higher incidence of domestic violence. Awareness is the only way. People need to know what domestic violence is and the steps required to make the workplace safer for women.”

Amrita, a member of a Jugnu club, a self-empowerment group formed by women tea pluckers and factory workers on tea estates in Assam state in northeastern India. With help from UN Women, the clubs help make agricultural work safe and fair for all women and girls.



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DISCOVERING WORRISOME TRENDS

Ad hoc reports and warnings from service providers pointed to a rise in violence against women and girls at the onset of COVID-19. For example, a police station in Hubei province in central China received three times more reports of domestic violence in February 2020 (162 reports) than in February 2019 (47).¹¹ But it was difficult to do face-to-face surveys as we could not ensure the safety of women from their abusers during data collection.

So UN Women partnered with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Internet researcher Quilt.ai to analyze big data in eight countries: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. It covered more than 20.5 million unique searches, along with social media posts, from October 2019 to November 2020.¹²

The analysis revealed worrying trends. Search queries related to violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual and psychological violence, rose after the onset of COVID-19. Topic clusters related to intimate partner violence such as “domestic violence signs” and “experiencing sexual violence”, rose sharply in searches.

Searches seeking help for abuse increased in six of the eight countries. Malaysia had the highest increase (70 per cent) compared to the pre-COVID-19 period, followed by Nepal (47 per cent) and Singapore (29 per cent).¹³

TAKING ACTION

In **Thailand**, UN Women and UNFPA in 2020 established the United Nations Country Team Gender-based Violence Sub-group. The subgroup worked with Government ministries and CSOs to immediately help women and girls during COVID-19 as well as to develop better longer-term protections and services for survivors. The subgroup worked with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to strengthen data systems to better understand the magnitude of gender-based violence and to develop real-time monitoring to be used for designing evidence-based and coordinated services across the ministries and CSOs.

In **Cambodia**, UN Women and UNFPA worked with local partners to simplify referral procedures so that survivors could more easily and immediately connect with essential health, legal and other services.

11. “Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women and girls”
12. “COVID-19 and violence against women: The evidence behind the talk”
13. “COVID-19 and violence against women: The evidence behind the talk”

In collaboration with Vodafone Idea Foundation and NASSCOM Foundation, UN Women in October 2020 launched an innovative smartphone app, My Ambar (My Horizon), to help women survivors of violence and their supporters in **India**. My Ambar helps users learn about violence against women, how to stand up against it, and how to understand and access health, legal, psychosocial and other support services across the country. UN Women is working with NASSCOM Foundation to expand the use of the app, especially by young people, including by training people to teach women and girls how to use it.

In **India**, UN Women also helped to reduce the economic vulnerability of women and girls who experienced violence or were at risk of violence. We provided cash transfers that enabled them to meet food and emergency needs and to find livelihood opportunities. During September-December 2021, unconditional cash transfers of INR 1,500 (\$35) each were distributed to 4,743 women of the most vulnerable groups: widows; orphans; the aged; COVID-19 survivors; people with disabilities; those who lost the household breadwinner or another family member; and migrant workers made jobless by the pandemic. Conditional cash transfers of INR 10,000 (\$135) each were distributed to 98 women micro-entrepreneurs, to help them enhance their skills and learn to use digital technology to restart their businesses or to restore their livelihoods.

In **Sri Lanka**, UN Women helped women heads of households with a project called Hidden Challenges: Addressing Sexual Bribery Experienced by Military Widows and War Widows in Sri Lanka to Enable Resilience and Sustained Peace. The 2018-2020 project used advocacy initiatives such as theatrical performances of traditional folk tales to bring attention to issues that are often considered taboo in Sri Lanka. It was the first-ever intervention in Sri Lanka to raise awareness about sexual bribery and exploitation of women.

The project enhanced the women's economic empowerment and leadership skills, with the overall goal of promoting them as agents of peace and enabling them to stand up against sexual exploitation. UN Women provided the women with trainings on financial literacy, product development, business management, marketing, and use of technology to develop businesses. The best business plans in a competition were given in-kind support so sustainable and resilient businesses could be set up. The leadership training gave the women the opportunity to talk about being single women heading households; through this they came together as a strong collective. The project was funded by the United Nations Development Programme's Multi-Partner Trust Fund and the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund. In September 2021, UN Women wrapped up

an ambitious, wide-ranging 4 ½-year programme, Stepping up Solutions to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls in Asia and the Pacific. The programme did studies, events, training and community mobilization that involved men and boys, teachers and students, local and national Governments and policymakers, the judiciary, law enforcement, service providers, survivors and activists. In addition to work across the region, the programme supported community- and school-based projects in **Viet Nam** and in **Timor-Leste**. The Governments of Australia and the Republic of Korea funded the programme.

SUPPORTING VIOLENCE SURVIVORS AND CRISIS CENTRES

Working with United Nations partners and national health officials, UN Women developed guidelines for women to safely access shelters for survivors of violence during the pandemic. We gave the shelters personal protective equipment and cleaning and disinfecting supplies and tracked outbreaks of COVID-19 there. We also provided counselling, medical care, security, home visits and life-skills training.

In **Bangladesh**, in response to the growing number of women fleeing abuse in their homes, UN Women helped an NGO-run shelter to adopt COVID-19 prevention measures so it could stay open and expand its services. We helped the shelter provide vocational skills training followed by job placements for survivors.

In **Pakistan**, UN Women helped to create gender-sensitive operating procedures for women's crisis centres in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan regions. We worked to strengthen essential gender-based violence services (police, social workers, prisons and shelters) nationwide, especially in hard-to-reach and high-risk areas.

With funding from the Government of Japan, UN Women worked with the **Sri Lanka** Government's Women's Bureau to expand the capacities of safe houses for survivors of violence. Domestic violence cases surged during lockdown in a country where 1 in every 5 ever-partnered women are reported to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner in their lifetimes.

Under The Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls, UN Women helped the women's crisis centres in **Fiji** and **Tonga**. The partnership brings together Governments, CSOs, communities and other groups. The €22.7 million programme is funded primarily by the European Union, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and cost-sharing with UN Women. The five-year programme lasts until the end of 2022.

SUPPORTING HELPLINES

By giving phone credits and mobile hotspots to women who were struggling to afford basic necessities, UN Women made it possible for them to access helplines and essential services. In remote locations, we and our partners used online technology to connect survivors with support services and to promote helpline numbers.

In **Pakistan**, UN Women and the Ministry of Human Rights jointly set up the National Helpline (1099) for survivors of domestic violence. We made provincial helplines more accessible to survivors through mobile apps and SMS support for psychosocial counselling and referrals.

In **Thailand**, UN Women's Safe and Fair programme trained the 1300 Hotline team on handling cases of gender-based violence and manages the hotline with the Government's social assistance centre.

In **Cambodia**, a partnership with Child Helpline Cambodia, an NGO, provided training for hotline operators, including on how to respond to cases among women migrant workers.

SUPPORTING COVID-19 QUARANTINE CENTRES

In **Nepal**, UN Women partnered with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens to create a gender equality and social inclusion checklist for mandatory isolation facilities. The checklist was used to monitor standards of safety and dignity, and the availability of essential services for women, girls, children, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, and other vulnerable groups.

The model for the checklist came from a UN Women partnership with UNICEF and the Government of Viet Nam, which applied a similar approach in 392 quarantine centres across the country. Similar initiatives took place in **Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan** and **Timor-Leste**.

In **Myanmar** and **Indonesia**, we gave training to quarantine centre staff on violence against women.

In **Papua New Guinea**, UN Women worked with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health to train health workers in quarantine centres on a code of conduct on human rights and dignity.

UN Women also supported quarantine facilities for women migrant workers who had to return home because of the pandemic.

EXTENDING PSYCHOSOCIAL HELP

UN Women's rapid assessments identified the heightened emotional and mental health effects that the COVID-19 pandemic was having on women throughout the region.

In Cox's Bazar, **Bangladesh**, UN Women staff members provided psychosocial support through door-to-door visits and focus groups in 13 camps for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. We also provided such support through our Multi-Purpose Women's Centres in the camps.

In **the Philippines**, UN Women put together a team of psychosocial support experts and social workers to work with a new task force of Government agencies and NGOs to scale up first response aid to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. The Safe and Fair programme's Babaeng BiyaHero (Women Voyager and Hero) campaign set up a psychosocial support team to help women migrant workers and front-line workers during the pandemic.

SPREADING THE MESSAGE FAR AND WIDE

In countries where fewer women, particularly refugees, have phones, UN Women used public service announcements on community radio stations, television advertisements, door-to-door visits, focus groups and socially distanced courtyard meetings to provide millions of women and girls with psychosocial support and information about the pandemic and services, including for survivors of gender-based violence.

In **Bangladesh**, UN Women in 2020 partnered with local women's organizations and NGOs to help radio stations and imams (Muslim prayer leaders) frame messages on preventing gender-based violence. A network of 14 community radio stations broadcast these regular public service announcements, reaching an audience of over 7 million people. Nearly 17,000 imams incorporated these messages into their sermons in the mosques. In addition, young women who had won a competition organized by UN Women developed social media messages on domestic violence and safety for survivors; these messages reached more than 29,000 people.

UN Women joined hands with Twitter to get life-saving information to women across Asia and the Pacific who were trapped at home with their abusers during lockdowns. In June 2020, we launched a smartphone prompt in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. If a Twitter user searched for terms like "abuse", "sexual assault" or "domestic violence", a notification would flash across the screen urging them to seek help if needed, followed by a hotline number and Twitter handle.

INDONESIA

“THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CREATED A NEW CHALLENGE FOR WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new challenge for women migrant workers. There were cases of women migrant workers who returned home and experienced emotional violence from their family members as they are no longer contributing income to their families.

The workload has been enormous for us and it has been difficult to find new volunteers who are willing to join us, as many potential volunteers are afraid of contracting COVID-19.

But violence does not stop. In fact, it is increasing. This means that more survivors need support from our shelter, at the same time as we are supposed to decrease the number of survivors residing here, work with fewer volunteers and manage increased costs. The support from the Safe and Fair Programme was truly timely and critical for us to keep the shelter open.

You may wonder how I can continue working despite all these challenges. It is not an easy time for any of us. However, there are survivors who need my support. They face risks of violence and exploitation, and some of them could be in critical life-and-death situations. ... When survivors whom I supported feel happy and express their rights, I no longer feel stressed.”

Karmila Jusup is a social worker at Pasundan-Durebang Women’s Crisis Centre in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The CSO runs a shelter for survivors of violence, provides legal and psychological counselling, and organizes trainings to empower survivors.



<http://unwo.men/b6Yj5oJwGJW>

SUPPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS

While migrating, especially if unaccompanied and through irregular channels, women workers are at increased risk of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. Many are undocumented and work in low-paid, informal sectors of the economy with limited access to basic services and protections. During the pandemic, their vulnerabilities heightened.

UN Women acted quickly to ensure that women migrant workers who experienced violence during COVID-19 received help, both in their country of origin and in their destination.

The European Union, one of UN Women’s key programme funders in Asia and the Pacific, supported the programme Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers’ rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region. Safe and Fair is implemented through a partnership between ILO and UN Women, in collaboration with UNODC. The programme is part of the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, a global multi-year initiative between the European Union and the United Nations.

In **Cambodia**, the programme trained Ministry of Women’s Affairs staff members on how to help survivors of violence better with information and communications technology such as video conferencing equipment and new mobile meeting applications so that they could access support and protection services. Also, the UN Women-supported MyJourney app, designed to be accessible to those with low literacy, put information on referrals, risks of violence and safe migration in the hands of Cambodian migrants.

In **Malaysia**, the programme supported Women’s Aid Organization, an NGO, to meet the increased help-seeking requests through a WhatsApp hotline called Think I Need Aid, or TINA. Women were able to text with a counsellor, make appointments for face-to-face consultations, and receive referrals to shelters and other services.

In **Indonesia**, Safe and Fair helped the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection to develop the Guideline on the Protection of Women Migrant Workers during COVID-19 and the Protocol for Handling Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking during COVID-19. These regulations, issued in December 2020, were designed to ensure the workers could get comprehensive services.

The Spotlight Initiative helped safe houses in **Papua New Guinea** to reopen and remain operational under the restrictions of COVID-19.

CHANGING PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES

In Asia and the Pacific, violence against women often is underpinned by longstanding perceptions about women's "place" and roles. So efforts to change social attitudes and cultural norms are key.

In **Pakistan**, the local women's rights group Shirkat Gah implemented UN Women's Drivers of Change project, which ended in February 2020. The project worked in 40 villages in four provinces to change

people's attitudes about violence against women and girls; create a communal environment conducive to preventing such violence; and link survivors with services and ways of getting redress. The project also empowered the women economically so they could take on a greater role in household decision-making. This project was funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

In 2020-2021 UN Women also worked to address women's mistrust of the legal system and figures of authority, and the impact of perpetrators and instigators of violence and shame.

BANGLADESH

"CHILD MARRIAGE IS A CURSE FOR YOUNG WOMEN."

"There are so many problems in our society. ... Problems like child marriage, gender-based violence and gender inequality. During the coronavirus pandemic, these issues have increased.

Child marriage is a curse for young women, who cannot develop their talent due to child marriage and dowry. Their dreams have been broken down. Also, they suffer from so many health consequences if they are married off at an early age. I have so many friends who are working as homemakers while still in their childhoods. I cannot cook yet, but they are cooking for their husbands' families. If they cannot do it, they face consequences from the in-law's family.

My friend was married by her family at the age of 14. She was my classmate and we used to go to school together. After she was married, she got pregnant while still only a child.

Her first child died due to weakness and malnutrition during childbirth. After that she gave birth to two daughters, but the children are not healthy. ...

Her husband went abroad once. ... He returned and started torturing her for dowry. Unable to bear the torture, she moved to her father's house, but she did not have a place in her father's home due to poverty. So she left her little children to her parents' care and went out to look for a job. She got a low-paid job in a garment factory because she had only completed up to eighth grade in school. Her body has become weaker due to working so hard at such a young age.



Rima Sultana Rimu is shown at the office of UN Women's partner NGO Jago Nari Unnayan Sangstha, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, on 23 September 2020. Photo: UN Women/ Mahmudul Karim

Her husband has since married another woman, but her struggles are not over -- she continues to struggle to feed her two children.

When I see her, I remember the words she used to tell me on our way to school. Her dream was to be a teacher. She wanted to work for her people and to pursue so many dreams that she had. But today it is sad to say that child marriage has consumed her dreams. It is also stealing the dreams and happy lives of thousands of other girls like her. ...

But unfortunately, people's attitudes are not changing because there are not enough people working for the betterment of society. So we must do it ourselves and volunteer to work to make change possible and we must empower those who are working for a better world."

Rima Sultana Rimu, 19, is a Bangladeshi activist in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. She has made literacy of Rohingya refugee women and girls her mission. Rimu is a part of the Young Women for Leadership network, a programme of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders organized in partnership with the local women's rights organization Jago Nari Unnayan Sangstha and supported by UN Women. She made the BBC's list of 100 inspiring and influential women worldwide for 2020.



<http://unwo.men/abXW5oJwGK6>

UN WOMEN PROGRAMME HELPS ADDRESS VIOLENCE AT SCHOOLS AND HOMES IN TIMOR-LESTE

Thanks to a UN Women programme, hundreds of schoolchildren and their parents in Timor-Leste learned how to treat each other with greater respect in the classroom, at home and in the community.

UN Women worked with educational institutions, CSOs Alola Foundation and Mane ho Vizaun Foun (Men with a New Vision), and the Ministry of Education to run the Connect with Respect programme on preventing violence against women and girls by promoting healthy relationships in 15 schools in three municipalities of Timor-Leste.

The CSOs gave the training to 450 parents – most of them farmers — and then a separate set of training to 450 children in school. The idea was for the parents to help their children apply what they had learned and to foster healthy relationships at home.

This holistic approach engaged parents, teachers and students to prevent violence against women and girls, and to respond to any violence they may experience in, around and on the way to school.

Connect with Respect, a one-year programme that ended in December 2021, was part of the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls.

Parents in the programme sessions did role plays to counter harmful gender roles and expectations, discussed their relationships with their children at home, and analyzed videos showing harmful parent-children relationships and ways they can avoid them.



UN Women staff member Gerdrudes Abedita helps a mother complete a form during a Positive Parenting Session in Bobonaro municipality of Timor-Leste on 28 September 2021. Photo: UN Women/Helio Miguel

Bento Pereira, a parent from Bobonaro municipality who took the training, said: “Education at home is crucial, instilling our children with gender equality values that will determine the way they respect women and girls throughout their lifetime.”

Said parent Amaro Ribeiro Amaral from Viqueque municipality: “Traditionally, educating children through physical forms of discipline was deemed appropriate, but the more I learn about respectful communication with children, I realize that children can become much closer to the parents through other forms of discipline.”

“What we learn is completely new and most parents in rural areas face difficulties in reading and writing and were never given the opportunity to participate in trainings like this,” said Leonor Gago, a parent from Ermera municipality. “Now we are all empowered to become change-makers, not just for ourselves but most importantly our children.”

In Timor-Leste, at least 1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence during her lifetime. Research shows that exposure to violence is high among people 15–19, indicating that it often starts early in women’s lives.



<http://unwo.men/nMhB5ojwGkk>



(From left) A police officer, a mother and a father do a role play on non-violent relationships with children at home for a Positive Parenting Session in Viqueque municipality of Timor-Leste on 26 August 2021. Photo: UN Women/Sylvio da Fonseca

ENLISTING THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S HELP

UN Women encouraged private businesses to help end violence by committing to its Women's Empowerment Principles and investigating sexual harassment, violence and exploitation in the workplace, operations and supply chains, and ensuring that systems are in place to prevent and report abuse and harassment. We encouraged businesses to help women's shelters, crisis centres and helplines for survivors of violence by donating business services, free calls to helplines, advertising space, mobile phones and phone plans; by funding clothing, cash, vouchers and mobile phones; by giving technology help for shifting to web, text and remote crisis support services; and by funding service providers so they can maintain or expand services during the pandemic.

It's clear from experience in Asia and the Pacific in 2020-2021 that stemming the rising tide of violence against women and girls requires multiple partners and efforts on multiple fronts.



Afghan women leaders and human rights defenders speak to reporters outside the UN Security Council Chamber in New York City on 21 October 2021. From left are: Asila Wardak, Fawzia Koofi (speaking), Anisa Shaheed and Naheed Farid. Photo: UN Women/Amanda Voisard

IV. PROMOTING LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

UN Women’s programmes on leadership and governance are guided by international commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in September 2020. The pandemic has reversed some of the limited gains women in the region had made since that declaration, but it also has given women a chance to show how they can make a difference in leadership roles.

Data published in November 2020 found that while they made up only 8 per cent of political leaders globally, women headed an estimated 40 per cent of “the most successful responses to COVID-19”.¹⁴ Women leaders were both faster to respond to the pandemic and were more likely than their male counterparts to put greater emphasis on social and environmental well-being as the pandemic progressed.¹⁵

In the Asia-Pacific region, such leaders included Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, and Dechen Wangmo, Health Minister of Bhutan and newly elected President of the World Health Assembly.

Yet while women were at the vanguard of effective COVID-19 responses, from the highest levels of decision-making to front-line service delivery, they continued to be underrepresented in politics and the civil service. The challenges faced by communities in times of crisis are most acutely felt by women, so societies risk losing important knowledge on vulnerabilities when not enough women are included in COVID-19 and other crisis task forces.

In 2020-2021, UN Women adapted its leadership focus to the pandemic context. We helped ensure that women’s and girls’ leadership was central to each

14. “Women in politics: New data shows growth but also setbacks”

15. *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19*

THE NUMBER OF SEATS HELD BY WOMEN IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC GREW FROM 13 PER CENT IN 2000 TO 20 PER CENT IN 2020.

Government's pandemic response. We worked closely with policymakers to analyze the pandemic's impact on women's leadership and political participation and to demonstrate the opportunity to "build back better" by including women in decision-making on the future, post-pandemic.

In **Myanmar**, UN Women mobilized women-led organizations — especially Rohingya women who had graduated from the Gender Leadership Programme -- to inform people in the communities about COVID-19 prevention and response.

In **Papua New Guinea**, in 2020 we mobilized women politicians to take part in radio broadcasts to raise awareness of gender-based violence among their constituents and to share information about the pandemic.

BOOSTING POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The number of seats held by women in national parliaments in Asia and the Pacific grew from 13 per cent in 2000 to 20 per cent in 2020. But this aggregate still falls below the global average of 25 per cent, and representation is even lower in some subregions. South and South-West Asia and the Pacific lag the furthest behind, with only 17 per cent of seats held by women. In a staggering 33 per cent of countries, women's representation in national legislatures in 2020 fell below 25 per cent of women's proportion of the overall population.¹⁶

As of 1 January 2020, seven Asia-Pacific countries had no women in ministerial positions: Brunei Darussalam, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam. Across the region, the ministerial roles that women did occupy were often restricted to portfolios such as family and social affairs. Few women were in charge of parliamentary affairs, population, defence, finance and human rights. Only 7 per cent of all environment-related ministries had a woman minister, compared to a global average of 12 per cent. Thus, while women are disproportionately affected by climate and environment-related disasters, they were severely underrepresented in policy decision-making in those areas.¹⁷

With funding from the Government of Japan, UN Women in 2020 provided training for women entering politics in **Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand**. We also supported advocates in calling on governments and political parties to enshrine gender equality and women's empowerment in policymaking.

BOOSTING PRIVATE-SECTOR LEADERSHIP

Women in the Asia-Pacific held 20 per cent of managerial positions of all ranks in the private sector in 2020. That is more than two decades ago, but progress has been slow. Women's representation in middle and senior (rather than lower) management jobs was even lower, 17 per cent.¹⁸ UN Women programmes such as WeEmpowerAsia worked in 2020-2021 to raise the status of women workers and managers and women-owned businesses.

16. "Snapshot of women's leadership in Asia and the Pacific"

17. "Snapshot of women's leadership in Asia and the Pacific"

18. "High-level political forum on sustainable development" (E/2020/57*)



Based in Prancak village Sumenep, East Java, Indonesia, Latifah, a member of Asalamah women's group and other members sharing their experiences being a part of Asalamah group established under the Peace Village initiative to promote peaceful and resilient communities on 18 December 2018. Photo UN Women/ Eric Gourlan

V. ENHANCING PEACE AND SECURITY

In 2020 the international community celebrated the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which call for increasing the participation of women and incorporating gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts.

But over the years very few women have participated in peace negotiations in the Asia-Pacific region as negotiators, mediators and signatories.¹⁹ That's even though experience shows that meaningful participation of women leaders across all stages of peace processes contributes to long-lasting peace.

In 2021, armed conflict escalated in parts of Asia and the Pacific, most notably in Myanmar and Afghanistan, exacerbating insecurity for women and girls and their fundamental rights. At the same time, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic led to population restrictions and tightening of civic space, as governments invoked national emergency powers, closed borders, restricted movement and speech, and adopted warlike terminology of "battling an invisible enemy".

Violent extremist groups integrated COVID-19 into their narratives and propaganda, and women impacted by the pandemic, such as through loss of jobs and income, became more vulnerable to recruitment efforts.

At the same time these risks were heightened, defences were weakened.

Women's CSOs play a vital role in mobilizing support for peace talks and cessation of hostilities. However, almost three-quarters of the region's CSOs said they were negatively affected by the pandemic and some were forced to suspend activities altogether, particularly in remote areas, according to a UN Women assessment published in May 2020.²⁰ Sixty per cent of the women, peace and security organizations in the Indo-Pacific region reported that they had lost funding, according to a Monash University-UN Women study published in November 2020.²¹

19. "Snapshot of women's leadership in Asia and the Pacific"

20. "Rapid assessment: Impact of COVID-19 on women's civil society organizations"

21. *Mapping the Impact of COVID-19 in the Indo-Pacific Region II: Women, Peace and Security Practitioner Views*

UN Women gave financial and other support to CSOs and women's groups so that they could continue combating violent extremism while also aiding their communities during the pandemic.

In **Pakistan**, during 2020-2021 UN Women examined the drivers of extremist violence and its effect on women and girls in the context of COVID-19, and used the evidence to help the authorities develop appropriate responses.

Our work in Pakistan involved local CSOs, women leaders, community faith leaders, local government officials, men, and the media. We considered social cohesion through women's leadership as foundational to the prevention of violent extremism, and advocated for women to participate in policymaking and in affairs of the community and the household. We gave new economic opportunities to women who had lost incomes because of COVID-19, to increase their participation in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

With funding from the Government of Finland, UN Women had given technical support for the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Women of **Afghanistan** (on peace and security), 2015-2022.

After the Taliban's returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, many Afghans fled into Pakistan and violence by groups emboldened by the Taliban victory increased in Pakistan. Amid this heightened insecurity, UN Women started a partnership with Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority to counter extremism and promote social cohesion.

UN Women also supported track-two diplomacy between Afghanistan and Pakistan through cross-border initiatives on women, peace and security. The first series of dialogues of our Afghanistan-Pakistan Women for Peace Initiative, which started in July 2021, were held in Islamabad on 6-7 December 2021. A dozen Pakistan women met with a dozen Afghan women, seven of whom had travelled from Kabul. They included parliamentarians, human rights activists, journalists and academics. They discussed women's education and employment, good governance, and legislation and policymaking. Through the dialogues, the women established direct contact, exchanged ideas on handling conflicts and challenges, and charted a path for further collaboration for peace in the region.

The Government of Japan provided funding to the Government of **Sri Lanka** through UN Women to implement UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions calling on governments to ensure the participation and leadership of women's organizations in devising strategies to counter intolerance and violence.

Under its Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities project, UN Women helped the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and other ministries draft a national action plan on women, peace and security. UN Women organized a series of nationwide consultations with the Government, CSOs and women to gather perspectives for inclusion in the draft plan.

Also in Sri Lanka, UN Women joined UNFPA and United Nations Volunteers in a 2017-2020 project to promote peacebuilding among youths and women in the aftermath of the country's armed civil conflict. The United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund funded the project. The project convened 300 officials from 208 local authorities and 29 political parties in dialogues to develop common approaches to conflict and resolution. After such a dialogue in Kandy district, several Sinhalese participants said they had visited mosques in their constituencies and gained a better understanding of their Muslim constituents and Islam. Several formed women's committees in the local authorities; many others submitted proposals or did programmes on women's employment waste management, substance abuse and affordable housing.

Through the Coordination Centre for Children and Women in Southern Border Provinces, UN Women in **Thailand** continued working with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, CSOs and UNICEF to respond to violence and to promote women's social, economic and political participation in these troubled provinces, including in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace negotiations.

UN Women worked with women's groups in the southern provinces of Songkhla, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat to advocate for Government agencies to apply gender-responsive peacebuilding approaches to public policies. We helped at least 350 women and young people in these provinces with vocational training and with knowledge and skills on peacebuilding, digital literacy, the justice system, and violence against women.

In **Timor-Leste**, with funding from the Government of Japan, UN Women supported the implementation and monitoring of the national action plan on women, peace and security, 2016-2020.

In October 2020, Timor-Leste enacted a Gender Responsive Conflict Resolution decree that recognizes the essential contributions of women -- half of the 40 Government-appointed mediators are women. In partnership with the Ministry of Interior, UN Women gave the mediators comprehensive training on gender-responsive mediation. The women mediated civil disputes that could have otherwise turned violent.

To mark the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, UN Women organized a month-long series of events to assess the progress and gaps in implementing the women, peace and security agenda in the Asia-Pacific region. The events looked at issues that never would have crossed the Security Council's desk 20 years ago, including the participation of civil society in promoting social cohesion; hate speech and use of technology for peacebuilding; and the influence of masculinity and gender power relations on violent extremism in Asia.

EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

Studies have found that an increase in women's empowerment and gender equality has a positive effect on countering extremism.²²

UN Women's regional programme Empowered Women Peaceful Communities, funded by the Government of Japan, worked to strengthen evidence-based research on gender-responsive approaches to preventing violent extremism and promote innovative ways to counter extremist narratives. It helped local partners and Government agencies to empower women economically and to promote their leadership and participation in their communities. The programme worked in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka during 2017-2019. After that phase ended, in 2020-2021 the programme worked in Bangladesh, the Philippines and Thailand.

Building on the results achieved under the Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities programme, during 2019-2021 UN Women in partnership with Wahid Foundation started the second phase of the Peace Villages Initiative in **Indonesia**. This phase significantly enhanced the scope and substance of the initiative, thanks to funding support from the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Peace Villages set up by the initiative are all on Java island, which has long experienced civil conflict. Women are empowered to take greater roles and leadership in community decision-making on conflict prevention and resolution, including promotion of youth engagement, interfaith dialogue and livelihood opportunities. The concept has been incorporated into Indonesia's National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism 2021-2025, which was adopted with the support of UN Women in 2021. The National Counter-Terrorism Agency considers it a community-based model for gender-responsive conflict prevention to combat radicalization, intolerance and extremism.

The number of Peace Villages doubled from the original nine in early 2019 to 18 in 2021.

In 2019, UN Women had expanded a partnership with other United Nations agencies working on preventing violent extremism under the UN Peace Hub and deepened its work in the four Peace Villages in East Java. "Village action plans" to strengthen social cohesion were developed and implemented in all four villages; these plans involved strong women's leadership and participation. Local governments have strongly supported the plans and provided funding so they can be implemented and sustained. The Peace Villages initiative in East Java is a good practice that can potentially be replicated in other parts of Indonesia beyond Java island.

In **Bangladesh**, the Women Peace Café, which the Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities programme had launched with the Centre for Peace and Justice at Brac University, was expanded. The café is a platform for women students to exchange ideas and engage in social entrepreneurship that promotes peaceful communities and counters radicalization, violent extremism, misogyny and hate speech. UN Women provided café members with digital literacy training to strengthen their skills in identifying and countering online misogyny, fake news and hate speech specifically in the COVID-19 context.

22. [Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting](#)

THE PHILIPPINES

“PROTECTION AND EDUCATION FOR GIRLS ... ARE THE KEY TO WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT.”

“Women and children are in unsafe conditions in communities affected by armed conflict. ... I understand their situation because I also experienced this.

When I was still a child, my family was affected by clan feuding or what we call ‘rido’. I experienced having to flee with my family, living in one place after another to find safety. We suffered so much hardship. My parents had a hard time finding income. I was not able to go to school regularly. I read my lessons even during the times that we were fearing retaliation from the other clan. It caused me so much fear, and I cried a lot as a child. My mother had to care for the entire family, working around the clock and with very few hours of sleep.

UN Women taught me that our peacekeeping programmes can be effective if we increase the recruitment and training of women so they can be active responders and rescuers in the field. Women are effective field personnel; their presence and visibility already gives a calming effect to conflict-affected women and families.

My role as a police officer is to safeguard women and girls from all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence so they can have equal footing in finishing school and achieving their full potential as human beings.

Strategically, I see the need for community peace dialogues with women’s voices being equally heard and taken seriously, safe spaces for women and children in evacuation sites and areas frequently affected by conflict, and gender-sensitive search and rescue operations.

At a personal level, my aim is to bring hope and opportunities to the displaced, especially women and girls. Protection and education for girls is especially important because they are the key to women’s empowerment.”



Police Lieutenant Colonel Melbeth Mondaya poses for a photo in Davao City, Philippines on 23 November 2021. Photo: UN Women/Louie Pacardo

Police Lieutenant Colonel Melbeth Mondaya is Gender and Development Focal Point of the Philippine National Police Regional Office-Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. The region has long been affected by private armed groups, violent extremism and clan feuding. In November 2021, Mondaya participated in a workshop organized by UN Women and Bangsamoro Women Commission in cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine National Police and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. The workshop was part of UN Women’s programme Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN, funded by the Government of Canada. ASEAN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.



<http://unwo.men/8CFM5oJwGLo>

COUNTERING CYBERSECURITY THREATS

Cybersecurity has emerged as a critical area for the women, peace and security agenda in Asia and the Pacific. The misuse of digital platforms and technologies has worsened discrimination, conflict and other harm to women offline.

In 2021 UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific started a programme on Women, Peace and Cybersecurity. This programme did research on how online harms, threats and cyber-enabled crimes can threaten women's security, allowing us to make evidence-based recommendations on how to ensure that policies and laws on cybersecurity respond to women's needs.

UN Women also monitored links between the pandemic and online misogyny and hate speech in South and South-East Asia. A study found that as much of these regions was locked down from March until June 2020, the volume of and interest in misogynistic online content increased. Data from India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia showed that both the volume of misogynistic Facebook posts and tweets, as well as individuals' engagement with them, including likes, comments and shares, spiked during the lockdowns, with a 168-per cent increase from the same period in 2019.²³

Similarly, in Sri Lanka, India, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, the analysis showed spikes of 25 per cent or higher in relative search volumes for misogynistic profanity, slurs and hate speech in local languages. The majority of tweets expressing misogynistic narratives were shared by self-proclaimed members of misogynist organizations. With the easing of lockdowns from June 2020, the number of misogynistic posts and tweets decreased dramatically.²⁴

The UN Women-supported Cyber Harassment Helpline in **Pakistan** reported that prior to the pandemic, an average of 146 calls were received each month. During the lockdown, the number of calls spiralled to an average of 308 per month, a rise of almost 210 per cent. Along with UN Women, Digital Rights Foundation ran the helpline 24/7 and did a four-month campaign to raise awareness about cyberharassment and to show people how to use the Internet safely. UN Women and the foundation also offered digital safety assistance, legal aid and mental health counselling.

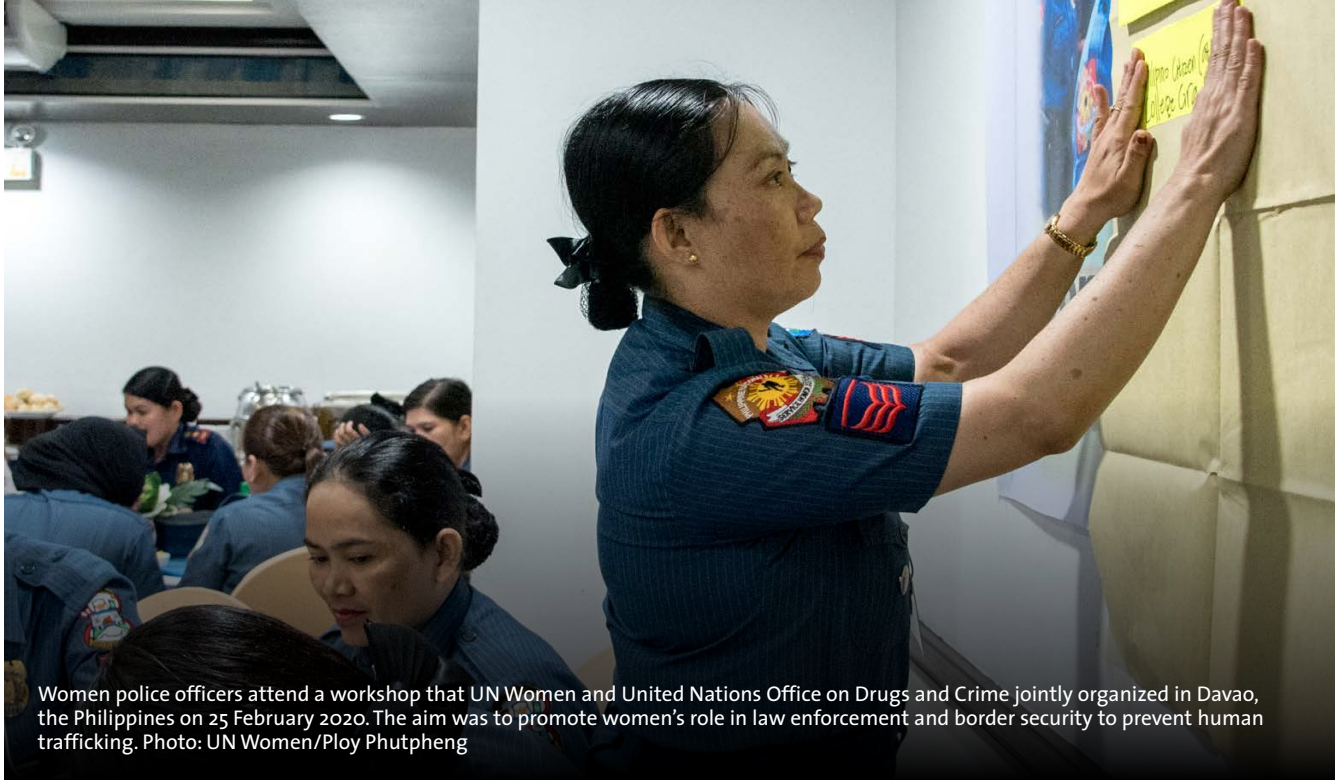
In **Indonesia's** Peace Villages supported by UN Women and Wahid Foundation, youths formed groups to counter online hate speech and to prevent COVID-19 from being used to instigate violence.

One basic barrier to resolving the cybersecurity problem is that women accounted for less than 10 per cent of the cybersecurity workforce in Asia and the Pacific in 2020. This gap has resulted in a lack of gender perspectives in cybersecurity, and in cybersecurity frameworks that fail to identify and respond to cyberthreats against women and girls.²⁵

23. "Social media monitoring on COVID-19 and misogyny in Asia and the Pacific"

24. "Building a stronger evidence base: the impact of gender identities, norms and relations on violent extremism"

25. "Women, peace & (cyber) security in Asia and the Pacific"



Women police officers attend a workshop that UN Women and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime jointly organized in Davao, the Philippines on 25 February 2020. The aim was to promote women's role in law enforcement and border security to prevent human trafficking. Photo: UN Women/Ploy Phutpheng

VI. STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In 2019, UN Women-supported report revealed that over five billion people do not have meaningful access to justice. UN Women contributed to closing the justice gap in Asia and the Pacific region by applying gender-responsive approach to community-based justice and work with the formal justice sector.

A UN Women brief published in July 2020 said that in Asia and the Pacific, incarceration rates for women were the highest in the world, and most of the women were incarcerated for non-violent and “morality” crimes. In China, Thailand, Myanmar and Viet Nam, women constituted 15 per cent and above of prison populations, compared to the global average of 4 per cent.²⁶

In **the Philippines**, the vast majority of women detainees serve sentences for non-violent offences that stem from socioeconomic issues and gender-based discrimination. In partnership with StreetLawPhilippines, Inc., an organization of lawyers and advocates for access to justice, in 2021 UN Women provided 15 jail wardens and 45 women detainees in jails in Cebu province with training on international standards for protecting the rights of incarcerated women. The project also organized dialogues among

detainees, jail wardens/personnel and justice service providers on the situation of the detainees. These sessions enabled the detainees to serve as paralegal assistants in women's prisons, helping other detainees document and seek help for access to justice concerns.

Asia and the Pacific countries have made progress in adopting laws against sexual and gender-based violence including domestic violence. But most attacks are still committed with impunity because of mistrust in the formal justice systems, severe case backlog and lack of gender-responsiveness of justice providers and institutions. In many countries across the region, cultural biases result in the survivor, and not the perpetrator, being blamed and shamed.

For these and other reasons, countries need to recruit and retain more women in law enforcement. Research published in 2020 and done jointly by UN Women, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, and INTERPOL found that as of 2019, the percentage of women law enforcement workers in the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ranged from 6 per cent in Indonesia to 20 per cent in Lao People's Democratic Republic.²⁷

26. “COVID-19, women, and prisons: Early release and non-custodial sentences for women as an effective means to reduce COVID-19 in prison populations”

27. *Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region*

The research found that the inclusion of women officers improves the operational effectiveness of agencies and increases community trust. The entries of new members to a group also can disrupt established corruption-related practices, the research said. But it also said that women faced significant barriers in pursuing a career in the region's enforcement agencies.²⁸

In partnership with the International Commission of Jurists and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Women has been implementing a five-year (2018-2023) programme, Enhancing Access to Justice for Women in Asia and the Pacific: Bridging the Gap between Formal and Informal Systems through Women's Empowerment. The programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

The programme helps to educate judges, police, prosecutors and informal justice adjudicators (e.g., tribal councils and village elders) on how they can use the Bangkok General Guidance for Judges in Applying a Gender Perspective.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED JUSTICE

Our access to justice programme supported gender-responsive community-based justice mechanisms in **Indonesia, Nepal** and **the Philippines**. That made judicial recourse available to women while many higher courts and services were closed due to the pandemic. In addition, the programme helped women's rights organizations and human rights

defenders work to achieve justice for women. Thanks to support from the programme, in 2021 the Peace Villages set up by UN Women and Wahid Foundation in **Indonesia** incorporated a community-based access to justice model for women with specific focus on domestic violence and sexual harassment in boarding schools. Informal, traditional community mechanisms are important for the majority of Indonesians to seek justice or mediation of conflicts. These mechanisms are usually dominated by men. Increasing women's participation and leadership in these mechanisms helps to ensure gender-responsive approaches to access to justice, including when women seek redress from sexual and gender-based violence and other gender-based conflicts.

In **Nepal**, UN Women worked with local partners to promote community-based justice in rural communities. Legal advisors provided technical assistance and training on gender-responsiveness and legal skills to local Judicial Committee members. This was implemented in 10 municipalities in Doti, Kailali and Sarlahi districts.

In **the Philippines**, the programme gave paralegal training to women and men who led grassroots and community-based organizations in nine communities in Quezon City and Davao City; this equipped them to work with informal justice providers such as barangay (the smallest local government unit in the Philippines) or community officials.

28. *Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region*



Chang Kimcheng, a farmer and ecotourism volunteer in Koh Kong, Cambodia nurses seedlings planted to protect the forest and transform the area into a sustainable tourist destination in 2021. Photo: UN Women/Antoine Raab

VII. PROTECTING AGAINST NATURAL DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Asia-Pacific is one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world. According to the World Risk Report 2020 of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 8 of the 15 countries most vulnerable to disaster impacts are in Asia and the Pacific. Between 2009 and 2019, over 40 per cent of natural disasters worldwide and over 90 per cent of all deaths from disaster occurred in this region, even though it has only 60 per cent of the world's population.²⁹

Deeply entrenched gender inequalities are exacerbated in crises, making women and girls more vulnerable to the impact of disasters. Women and children are more likely to die during disasters and are at greater risk of violence, forced marriage, human trafficking, health problems and loss of livelihood in the aftermath of disasters. Disaster-induced migration and displacement are on the rise in many places in Asia and the Pacific, and displaced women are most at risk of abuse.

During 2020-2021, UN Women worked with Governments in the region to develop gender-responsive climate action and to provide shelter, water, food, sanitation, emergency relief and protection services to recover from disasters and climate-induced emergencies. We and our partners worked to achieve social and environmental justice and to end human rights violations and gender discrimination in the context of climate change.

Under the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice, UN Women created partnerships in the region to address gender inequalities and facilitate the participation of CSOs in the discussions. The Action Coalitions are global, multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to take collective action, increase public and private investment, and deliver concrete results for girls and women.

29. *The Disaster Riskscape Across Asia-Pacific: Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion and Empowerment*

FIXING THE DEARTH OF DATA

One basic problem has been that the region's countries had virtually no data to monitor progress on SDG 13 on climate action from a gender perspective.

During 2020-2021 UN Women helped to collect sex-disaggregated data on the number of people killed, missing or affected by climate change and disasters and on the social and economic outcomes following them. Our Women Count: Asia and the Pacific programme said that only a quarter of countries in the region had a law on gender statistics or explicitly covered gender data in a general statistics law. The region with the lowest availability of gender data related to the SDGs was the Pacific, which lacked data for more than half of the goals' gender indicators. Most countries weren't collecting sex-disaggregated data, while those that did may not have been collecting it according to internationally agreed standards. And in many countries, data was not collected in a timely or comprehensive way, allowing limited scope for analysis.

Therefore, the Women Count programme:

- Worked with intergovernmental bodies to improve coordination on gender statistics, including to create an Intergovernmental Group on Statistics on Gender and the Environment
- Gave technical support to countries to localize the SDGs from a gender perspective and select a set of priority gender indicators
- Worked with governments and development partners to create a roadmap for the production and use of gender data in the Pacific subregion

The data was used to inform and implement UN Women's EmPower: Women for Climate- Resilient Societies programme, which aimed to establish gender equality and human rights as a priority in climate change and disaster risk actions in Asia and the Pacific.

This programme worked with local CSOs and women leaders to take action on climate change, and helped to build the capacity of women's organizations to advocate for women's needs and roles in tackling climate change.

Jointly run by UN Women and United Nations Environment Programme, EmPower targeted Bangladesh, Cambodia and Viet Nam, as well as regional policy processes and platforms. The programme runs from 2018 to 2022 and is funded by Sida.

In 2020, the programme added as new partners other United Nations agencies working on climate change and disaster risk reduction, such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Development Programme, and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

IMPROVING LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

In **Bangladesh**, EmPower collected sex, age and diversity-disaggregated data and developed gender profiles at the union and *upazilla* (regional administration) levels so that gender-sensitive climate policies could be made.

Women make up a large share of the labour force in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry, which often does not provide welfare, safety or social security benefits. The programme reduced the vulnerability of these workers to both climate and disaster risks by stemming gender-based violence, protecting labour rights, and strengthening workplace safety measures.

UN Women helped the Government of Bangladesh to adopt policies to mitigate women's vulnerabilities to the effects of climate change, including by providing them with livelihood opportunities. By giving training to Government officials, UN Women improved the Government's ability to integrate gender into disaster risk reduction planning, and to expand women's leadership in disaster risk reduction and climate change activities.³⁰

UN Women's National Resilience Programme worked closely with Bangladesh's Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief to develop the National Plan for Disaster Management 2021-2025 – the first time the plan has included gender mainstreaming (accessing the implications for women and men of any planned action) and women's empowerment for all its listed actions. The National Resilience Programme also gave technical and financial help to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to create methodological guidelines and protocols for data producers and users integrating gender and social inclusion in statistics on climate change and disasters.

In **Cambodia** and **Viet Nam**, the EmPower programme helped Governments prepare updated "nationally determined contributions" -- the commitments by each Member State under the Paris Agreement on climate change -- that better integrated gender concerns. It also helped Governments mainstream gender in their climate policies.

30. "Women's participation and leadership in gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation"

As previously mentioned, in **the Philippines**, the Safe and Fair programme helped draft a bill on meeting women's needs during disasters and public health emergencies -- the proposed Gender Responsive and Inclusive Protocols Pandemic Management Act of 2021.

ENHANCING RESILIENCE

In **China**, UN Women's three-year project targeting one of the country's poorest provinces, Strengthening Qinghai Women Farmers' Income Security and Resilience in a Changing Climate, ended in September 2021. It benefited over 69,000 rural women, many of them ethnic minorities. In collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Qinghai Rural Revitalization Bureau, and the Qinghai Women's Federation, the project helped the women escape poverty and strengthened their resilience through adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices and entrepreneurship development. Six women-led businesses were set up or strengthened with increased access to resources, technologies and markets.

In June 2021 UN Women partnered with the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Hunan Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs to jointly undertake the five-year Hunan Rural Revitalization Demonstration Project. The project aims to help people in rural areas of 10 pilot counties in Hunan Province to build up their climate resilience through climate-proofed infrastructure construction, climate-smart agriculture skills development, and increased livelihood opportunities.

MOVING QUICKLY TO REACH DISASTER VICTIMS

In April 2020, Cyclone Harold devastated parts of **Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga** and **Vanuatu**. UN Women helped women's crisis centres to quickly mobilize after the cyclone and make mobile counselling visits. In Vanuatu, centre staff members made 30 in-person visits to three areas in the aftermath of the cyclone. We provided training for the centres to continue operating, and for helpline operators, health workers and Red Cross volunteers to respond to gender-based violence. In areas that were difficult to reach, UN Women and its partners used apps such as Zoom and Facebook to connect survivors to assistance and promoted helpline numbers through easily accessible infographics and SMS via mobile phone companies.

Seven months later, UN Women undertook its first direct humanitarian emergency response effort in **the Philippines**, a pilot for collaboration between the humanitarian and private sectors in emergency response. Typhoon Ulysses (also known as Vamco), a category 4 typhoon, struck northern Philippines and parts of Viet Nam on 11 and 12 November 2020. In the Philippines, it swamped houses in Rizal Province with mud from the overflowing Marikina River and landslides from the mountains. UN Women identified the worst-hit communities and acted as the main coordinator of the relief effort involving donors, entrepreneurs and private-sector groups; this effort helped thousands of people.

Working with businesses and individual donors involved in WeEmpowerAsia and with funding from the Government of Japan, UN Women organized the Agapay Nanay (Support to Mothers) initiative to help meet the immediate needs of 400 women and their families in Barangay Banaba in San Mateo, Rizal. We provided clothing, sleeping bags, first aid and hygiene kits, and COVID-19 prevention kits as well as power and cleaning tools to wash homes and surroundings flooded by mud and trash. We provided about 450 women and their families in Barangay Tanza Dos, Navotas City, with drinking water, food packs, hygiene kits, and wooden planks to repair pathways around the homes built on stilts. We partnered with women-led community-based organizations such as Solidarity of Oppressed Filipino People and Buklod Tao, as well as community volunteers, to give logistical support to the relief effort.

UN Women had six "gender officers" in 12 camps for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, **Bangladesh**, to support COVID-19 and cyclone and monsoon preparedness and response, and cases of gender-based violence and other protection issues. To prevent an added humanitarian crisis in the already-vulnerable camps, 24 Rohingya volunteers worked with UN Women to mobilize their communities and raise awareness of COVID-19.

As witnessed during natural disasters and civil conflicts as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, women have acted as first responders and have been integral to the survival and resilience of families and communities. When women are meaningfully engaged and their needs are addressed, humanitarian action is more efficient and effective, the transition to recovery accelerated, and community-wide resilience is enhanced.

FOR MORE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES, MORE WOMEN LEADERS ARE NEEDED IN WASTE MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA

Improving waste management starts at home, but its benefits go well beyond -- to a cleaner environment, more peaceful communities, and greater social and political leadership by women, who are key to making it all happen.

Rajeshwari Diaz, 46, and Kaweeda Manohari, 48, are among the many women who saw these benefits as they attended trainings and community dialogues organized by a project called Promoting Women's Engagement in Effective Solid Waste Management. UN Women ran the project jointly with United Nations Office for Project Services and Chrysalis,

a local NGO. The 2020-2021 project was expected to directly benefit about 4,000 people in Puttalam and Mannar, fishing and agricultural districts along Sri Lanka's western coast.

Diaz, who lives in Mannar, draws inspiration from her 80-year-old mother-in-law, who takes the lead in collecting and separating the household waste. The family gives the food waste to neighbours, who feed it to their farm animals, and keeps the other waste inside a compound for the municipality's waste collectors. The family not only keeps the house and garden clean but also the public road in front.



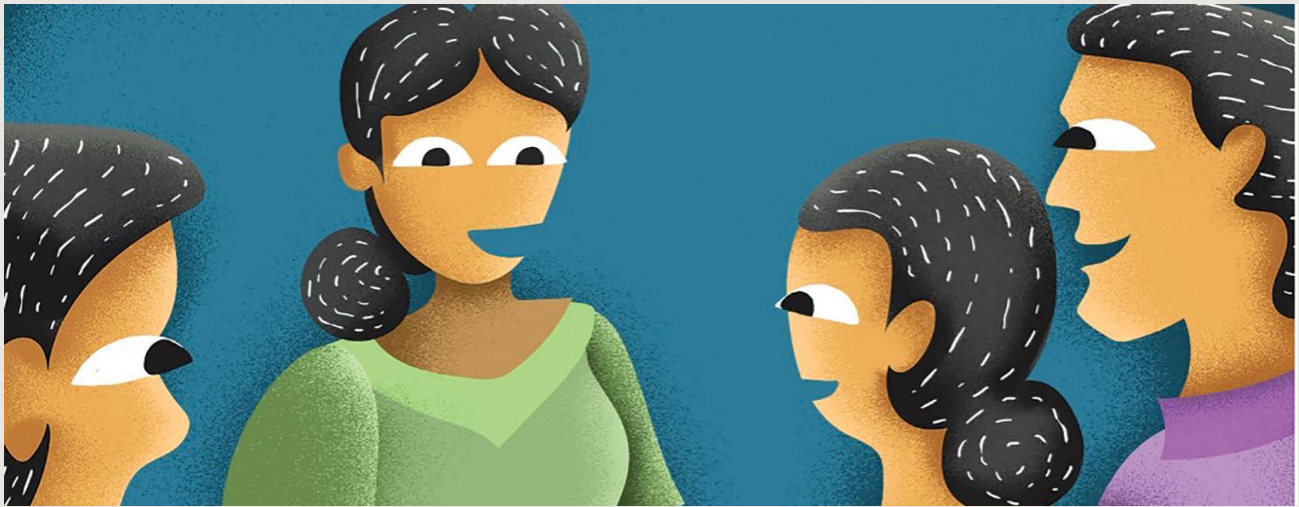
As a Community Development Officer, Diaz has taken part in the Mannar Urban Council's programmes to educate people about proper waste management.

She firmly believes that parents must teach good waste management practices to their children from an early age. She has told her son that if he leaves garbage lying around, flies and disease may come.

Diaz has seen how careless waste management also harms communal relations.

"Some people keep their garbage outside. Animals come and scatter them everywhere, and sometimes around other people's houses. This results in unnecessary arguments," she said.

Through the UN Women project, Diaz not only learned about proper waste management but also ways to manage such conflicts.



“Before making decisions and jumping to conclusions, we should think about others’ feelings and views,” she said.

Manohari is a member of the Municipal Council in Chilaw, a town in Puttalam. Like Diaz, she also believes that the same spirit of cooperation that is needed at home is needed in the community.

She said that most waste-related conflicts arise from people dumping waste on public land and roads, and these conflicts “sometimes ... end up with violence and law enforcement getting involved”.

Manohari said the UN Women programme training changed her approach to conflict resolution.

“Recently, while the programme was being conducted, I had to be a mediator to a conflict between two parties that could have ended up in violence,” she said. “Since it was fresh in my mind, I was able to use some of the techniques I learned at our training to help the two parties arrive at a compromise and push for a legal solution.”

Taking forward another lesson from the trainings, Manohari has participated in a campaign to teach people how they can earn income by recycling plastic and other waste.

The local councils have the primary responsibility for collecting and disposing of waste. However, until recent years women made up less than 2 per cent of council members. In 2017, Sri Lanka introduced a 25 per cent quota for women in each council, but women continue to face barriers in engaging in community decision-making.

Manohari has seen how enthusiastically women in her community reuse waste material, such as by turning plastic bottles and polythene bags into containers for growing plants.

It’s clear, she said, that women can step up and take the lead on waste management and other community issues if given the opportunity.

* UN Women commissioned Boost Metrics, a Sri Lankan design agency, to do the text and illustrations for this article.



<http://unwo.men/Z8ZO5oJwGMv>

MYANMAR

UN WOMEN PROTECTING AND IMPROVING LIVES AMID EMERGENCIES IN MYANMAR

Naw Moh Moh Than, 18, aspires to become a teacher but she has had her journey disrupted several times. When she was in secondary school, armed conflict in Kayin State forced her and her family to flee to a displaced persons camp. With the help of one her teachers, she resumed her schooling in the nearest town but then the COVID-19 pandemic forced all the schools to close since the start of 2020.

Still, Naw Moh Moh Than remained determined. In 2021 she joined a sewing training that UN Women organized in the camp and made cloth masks that humanitarian groups bought and distributed to women across Kayin State, which is mostly populated by the Karen ethnic minority.

“If I can master this skill, I can also pass it on to the others in the village,” Naw Moh Moh Than said. “When the schools reopen again, I will try to finish my matriculation but in the meantime, the sewing skills that I have learned during this training will really benefit me.”

The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says women and girls made up 77 per cent of the people in displaced persons camps in Myanmar at the end of 2020, and they make up most of those who have been displaced since then.

UN Women has been working to ensure that emergency responses in Myanmar both take into account the specific needs of women and girls and make full use of their participation and leadership.

“Throughout the history of Myanmar, women have proven to be active agents in responding to crisis and key to the promotion of peace,” said Nicolas Burniat, Country Representative for UN Women in Myanmar. “We must step up our efforts to place women and women’s organizations at the centre of response to the current crisis.”

In Kachin State, home of the Kachin ethnic minority, Daw Zin Mar Aye, a 37-year-old teacher and mother, always felt there was something more that she could do. So she attended trainings provided by UN Women and learned more about the challenges and abuse women face in the camps. In 2017 she formed a network of women of various ethnic groups to promote peace and women’s empowerment and to prevent the abuse. In 2020, with



A community leader hands out face masks to protect against COVID-19 in Myanmar in 2021. (Details of this photo have been withheld for security reasons.) Photo: UN Women/Khun Ring

UN Women’s support, Daw Zin Mar Aye began helping women in the camps who were experiencing gender-based violence during the pandemic.

Since the beginning of 2021, UN Women and local partners have distributed women’s hygiene and COVID-19 protection kits to over 20,000 women and over 3,500 men, focusing on the most vulnerable households and women in the camps and in crisis-affected areas of Kachin and Rakhine States. UN Women is helping over 10,000 vulnerable women, including displaced women and migrant workers, earn incomes and start livelihoods with cash transfers; training in making handicrafts, entrepreneurship and climate-smart agriculture; and cash grants to set up small businesses in Kachin, Kayin, Mon and Rakhine States and Tanintharyi Region.

In Rakhine and Kachin States, UN Women is partnering with UNFPA to help survivors of intimate-partner violence in crisis settings, and to try to stem domestic violence and gender-based violence. This includes providing financial aid, legal counsel and psychosocial support.

Additionally, to promote civil society’s participation in response efforts, UN Women has given training in leadership to about 160 women’s and youth groups in Mon and Kayin States.

The COVID-19 response of UN Women’s work in Myanmar is funded by the Governments of Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan and Sweden, as well as by the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, and the Central Emergency Response Fund of the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.



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